

# Maintaining terror as instrument of state control

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It is now eight years since the 33-year authoritarian regime in Indonesia was

pulled down, but the basic premise that constitutes authoritarian rule still remains.

The authoritarian personality, as Theodore W. Adorno

(1950) called it, is still the basis for the government — although it may have changed three times in almost a decade — mainly for its communism phobia, and this became grounds for political legitimacy four decades ago.

In his *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging*, Ariel Heryanto, current head of Indonesian Studies at the University of Melbourne in Australia, looks carefully at the issue of how anti-communism, which gave rise to the authoritarian New Order regime, maintains its hold on the national government — even though the New Order went belly-up a decade ago.

The incidents of 1965-66 that created the New Order regime is still remembered by many citizens as well as those in the bureaucracy — including the military apparatus — and there is a general consensus that “the same past may continue to be a defining factor in the national imagination and historical trajectory”. (p.3)

The mass killings that took place from 1965-66 in Indonesia was a phenomenon of the Cold War, which placed the Sukarno presidency in a very difficult situation. As part of the non-bloc movement created by several third world nation leaders, Sukarno tried to keep a balance between the western and eastern power blocs. However, Western nations read Sukarno's actions as a sign of a third-world leader who didn't want to cooperate or serve their interests.

This book discusses at both empirical and theoretic-

cal levels how the notion of anti-communism continued although the Cold War was outdated. One major signifier of this was the abolition of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) soon after the coup d'etat of 1965. Heryanto reveals his astonishment that the anti-communist outrage prevailed and that it had become even stronger in the first decade of the 21st century.

The aim of this book is to examine “the almost unstoppable mechanical reproduction and elaboration of fear and intimidation surrounding the possible re-occurrence of such major violence” (p.4). Thus, Heryanto defines the 1965-66 mass killings as the central narrative that laid down the foundation of New Order legitimacy over the next three decades.

Rather than illustrating the incidents in detail, Heryanto discusses how the memories and the representation of the killings spilled over to create subsequent incidents, such as violence and stigmatization.

As part of his central argument, Heryanto broaches a series of trials and prosecutions that occurred in the late 1980s and early '90s in Yogyakarta, when three young activists (Hidayat, Darmawan and Rudy) were tried under the anti-subversion law for the possession, circulation and discussion of novels that were perceived by the state as part of communism teaching.

He then proceeds to detailed events and incidents from the 1970s-90s, during which many cases of persecution took place, indicating

the state's strong suspicion against its citizens and general society, highlighting particular individuals and publications related to the Left, “class analysis”, or the so-called Reds.

This suspicion — or paranoia — created a situation in which many young activists were spied upon or kidnapped, political opposition was easily controlled and efforts to criticize the state were perceived as a threat to authority and the nation.

In a humorous manner, Heryanto writes that the trials of the young activists demonstrated an ambiguity, in that the state did not really understand their function nor role. Arrogant ignorance was the real issue during the trials, when the presiding judge brutally declared that all publications tied to senior writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer and books with “Red” in their title (for instance, Iwan Simatupang's *Merahnya Merah*, or Red of the Red) would be categorized as communist texts.

This anti-communist position was replicated as other forms of control, such as banning Harold Crouch's scholarly book on the Indonesian military and its relation to politics and policy. The state became highly alert to paranoid regarding many publications suspected of being related to communism and leftist thinking. A picture or symbol that clearly showed a hammer and dagger was strictly forbidden, since it was the symbol of the PKI.

We can call this paranoia since the New Order government systematically prohibited ex-political prisoners —

which referred particularly to former members of the PKI and its subsidiaries — from holding strategic occupations such as the civil service, the military, press, school teachers and university lecturers.

Taking this paranoia into account, we can understand when in the mid 1980s the term *bersih lingkungan* (clean environment) arose, which dictated that an individual should prove themselves “clean” of any connections to leftist groups; moreover, that they had no relatives who were involved with such groups.

From an empirical standpoint, Heryanto turns to a theoretical perspective and argues that New Order Indonesia made room for “the regime's creativity and the constant pressure upon the regime to revive the communism threat or a simulation to that effect” (p. 140). Heryanto notes that in modern Indonesian history, only the New Order was committed or was desperately compelled to the militant reproduction of contemporary icons, monuments, fictions, trials and simulacra.

Here, Heryanto is using social theorist Jean Baudrillard's notion of simulacra, a situation in which the real becomes the hyper-real — for instance, when the New Order carried out a continuous reproduction of the supposed communist threat.

The writer, who lectured at the University of Satya Wacana in Salatiga, Central Java, from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, demonstrates his rich vocabulary and knowledge of current social science theories when he discusses

state terrorism and the problem of political identity.

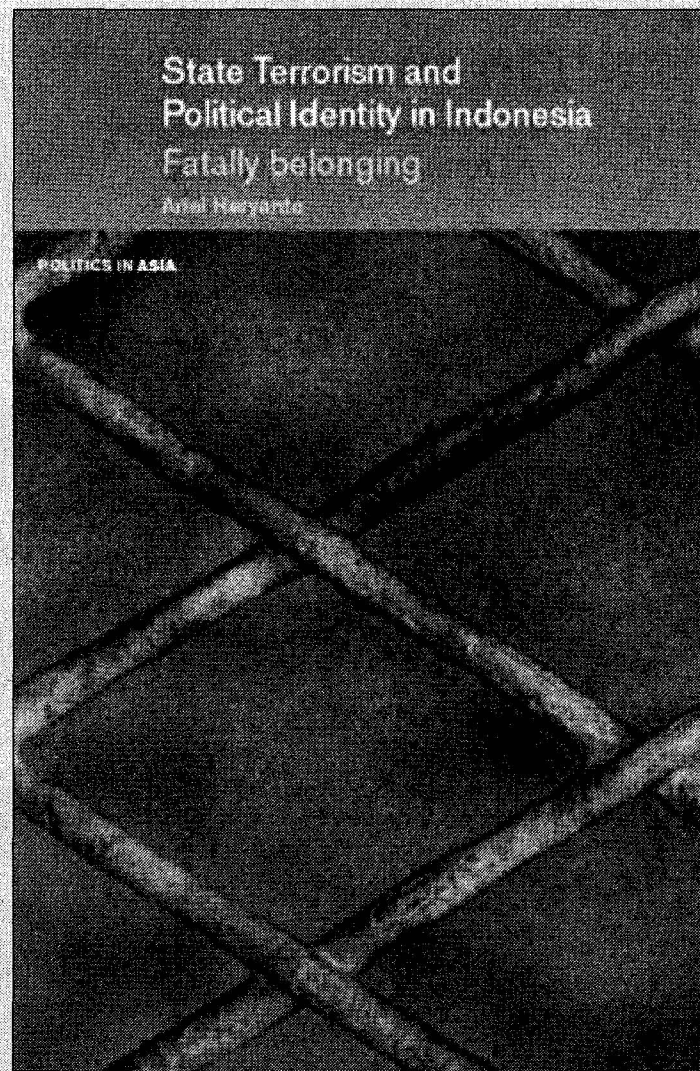
These two main issues concern the discussion of power, identity and history as an interplay or contestation of ideas in which these three factors are related one to another.

*State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia* provides an insightful look at one of the crucial memories of Indonesia as a nation-state, and Heryanto is very comprehensive in exploring both empirical and theoretical angles in explaining the government's take on the events. While Heryanto's book looks at the same issues covered by many writers, but his results are different in comparison to other theoretical perspectives.

Rather than contributing new facts to the events of 1965-66, Heryanto offers a better way to understand such events by defining them within the context of authoritarianism: that the state has used its political machine to create a continuous, almost timeless campaign against communism, even though it had already made all efforts to prevent former political prisoners from public view and contested their view of past incidents.

It is an irony — to be sure a tragic one — and it continues to the present day; yet contestation of power relations has proven to be the winning story of the liberal over the socialist bloc.

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*State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging*  
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